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PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EQUALITY: INSIGHTS FROM NYAYA PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the concept of equality in Nyāya philosophy and its relevance to contemporary debates on equality and fairness. Nyāya's definition of justice goes beyond material allocation and focuses on true knowledge, fair methods, equality, and no bias. This study compares justice in three traditions: Aristotle's proportionate equality theory, the classical Nyāya school of Indian philosophy, and John Rawls' liberal framework. According to Aristotle, justice is treating everyone fairly, differentiating between distributive and corrective forms, and basing fairness on virtue and the pursuit of the "good life." Nyāya, in contradiction, integrated epistemology, ethics, and legal reasoning, emphasizing truth, procedural integrity, and the reduction of bias as essential to justice. Rawls reimagined fairness in terms of the “original position” and “veil of ignorance,” offering a consensual model aimed at securing equal basic liberties and fair distribution of social goods. By placing these perspectives in dialogue, this paper highlights both their commonalities, such as the concern for fairness, order, and their distinctive contributions, with Nyāya philosophy expanding the epistemic dimension of justice, Aristotle focusing on moral virtue and proportionality, and Rawls focusing on institutional fairness. Together, these frameworks enrich contemporary debates by demonstrating that justice is not a singular concept but a plural and evolving ideal, shaped across diverse cultures and philosophical traditions.

KEY WORDS- Justice, equality, Nyaya philosophy, theory of justice, corrective justice, Aristotle, John Rawls, jurisprudence, and political theory.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary political and intellectual discussions, equality stands asa foundational principle that significantly influence and shape discussions on rights, governance, law, and human dignity. These concepts serve as normative foundations for creation of equitable institutions, determining just distribution of resources, and assurance ofthe moral legitimacy of political authority. They are not merely abstract ideals which are discussed in academic circles; rather, they serve as the essential criteria through which the legitimacy of institutions is tested, the moral authority of power is established, and the ethical dimensions of human relationships are assessed. Equality, basically, affirms the intrinsic moral worth of each individual and the imperative that opportunities, freedoms, and protections to be accessible without unjust discrimination[3].From Plato's concept of justice as harmony to Rawls' idea of "justice as fairness," equality has served as the core principle upon which theories of justice, rights, and morality have been constructed.

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[3]Nathaniel Kirby, *Two Concepts of Basic Equality*, 24 Res. Publica 297 (2018)

In the 21st century, the concept of equality assumes a renewed importance, shaped by globalization and unprecedented cultural connections alongside persistent social disparities. As societies evolve and embrace pluralism, characterized by a multitude of ethnic, religious, and cultural identities, the current challenge lies in harmonizing the universal principle of human equality with the requirements of contextual and situational justice. The contemporary meaning of equality today far extends beyond formal assertions of uniformity; it includes the moral and epistemic acknowledgment of each individual's ability for reason, dignity, and engagement in the pursuit of truth—a notion that aligns closely with the Nyāya philosophy's perspective on shared rational potential.[4]

Therefore, equality should not be viewed as a mere philosophical indulgence, but rather as an essential standard that societies must uphold to avoid moral disarray, institutional illegitimacy, and the continuation of systemic harm. It is crucial to engage not only with contemporary Western political theories but also to participate in conversations with different philosophical traditions, including Indian Nyāya philosophy, which provides unique and enduring insights into the ethical foundations of a just and equitable society.

The paradigm of justice has profoundly shaped modern Western political philosophy, *as John Rawls articulates fairness in his landmark work,A Theory of Justice* (1971)[5].According to Rawls, justice represents the "first virtue of social institutions." He argues that a just society must be structured to ensure equal basic liberties for all individuals, while also arranging social and economic inequalities in a way that benefits the least advantaged members of society. His two principles of justice—liberty and difference- offer a framework that integrates the process of fairness with an awareness of distributive justice, aiming to balance the principles of equality with the complexities of social diversity and economic disparity.[6] This perspective was particularly groundbreaking in the mid-20th century, marking a notable transition from utilitarian approaches to a moral framework grounded in reciprocity and rights.

Discussions regarding equality have expanded on a global scale and into systemic aspects. The notion of universal anticipation suggests that the principles of justice ought to transcend national boundaries to address global inequalities in wealth, opportunity, and political influence. This perspective reflects the realities of a globalized environment, where economic markets, environmental issues, and migration surpass state borders, necessitating more extensive frameworks of equality and fairness.

Together, these perspectivesillustrate that the entire notion of equality is dynamic and interdisciplinary. They include distributive, procedural, and epistemological concerns, all of which are crucial for addressing contemporary challenges. In this current age of cultural diversity, global interdependence, and the constant evolution of technology, the persistent development of these ideas signifies an ongoing endeavor to build just, equal, and more

[4]Devah Pager & Hana Shepherd, "The Sociology of Discrimination: Racial Discrimination in Employment, Housing, Credit, and Consumer Markets" (2008) 34 Annual Review of Sociology 181–209.
[5]JOHN RAWLS, A THEORY OF JUSTICE (rev. ed. Harvard Univ. Press 1999).
[6] M.Y. Said & Y. Nurhayati, A Review on Rawls Theory of Justice, 1 Int'l J. L., Env't & Nat. Res. 29, 29–36 (2021).

inclusive communities, which is an endeavor that can greatly benefit from engaging with various philosophical frameworks, including those rooted in Indian thought, such as Nyāya philosophy.[7]

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

In today's world, characterized by increasing economic inequalities, persistent discrimination, and the collapse of systemic institutions, the quest for equality has become more urgent than ever. The swift advancement of globalization, technological innovation, and environmental change has highlighted the structural inequalities that separate communities both domestically and internationally. Racial injustice continues to undermine the moral authority of legal frameworks and democratic institutions, whereas gender inequality is evident in wage gaps, lack of political representation, and widespread cultural prejudices that hinder women and marginalized gender identities from fully engaging in public affairs.[8]

In this context, the principles of equality extend beyond mere abstract philosophical theories; they serve as essential normative frameworks that should guide the formulation of public policies, the reform of legal institutions, and the structure of global governance.[9] These principles offer moral and conceptual instruments for evaluating the legitimacy of power, social equity, and the inclusivity of decision-making. Addressing these urgent matters requires a reevaluation of conventional theories of justice, alongside the development of innovative strategies, which are capable of addressing the complex and interrelated realities of contemporary society. In this context, the discourse on equality represents both a philosophical exploration and a practical approach to fostering more just and sustainable communities.

RESEARCH GAP

While modern theories of global justice have been influenced by Western liberalism, communitarianism, cosmopolitanism, and postcolonial critique, they are predominantly situated within intellectual traditions that are rooted in the European Enlightenment. Foundational texts in political philosophy, ranging from Rawls's contractarian framework of "justice as fairness" to Nussbaum's capabilities approach, have significantly influenced discussions surrounding distributive justice, rights, and equality. However, within both mainstream academic literature and institutional policy discussions, viewpoints arising from classical Indian philosophy, especially the Nyāya School, have received minimal attention, despite their potential to provide original and rigorous perspectives on the foundational concepts of equality and fairness.

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[7] Martha C. Nussbaum, Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach (Harvard Univ. Press 2011).
[8]Gaurav Nayyar, "Economic Growth and Regional Inequality in India" (2008) 43(6) Economic and Political Weekly 58–67.
[9] Elliot Turiel, Eunkyung Chung & Jessica A Carr, "Struggles for Equal Rights and Social Justice as Unrepresented and Represented in Psychological Research" in Stacey S Horn, Martin D Ruck & Lynn S Liben (eds), Advances in Child Development and Behavior, vol 50 (JAI 2016) 1–29.

Despite these unique contributions, the Nyāya perspective remains noticeably absent from critical conversations regarding global justice, equality, and rights. This oversight can be attributed, in part, to the existence of academic silos. Political philosophy in the Western context has often dismissed the non-Western traditions to the categories of "cultural" or "comparative," rather than recognizing them as sources of universally relevant normative theories.

This omission constitutes a significant research gap. By not incorporating Indian philosophies such as Nyāya into global and universal justice discourse, contemporary scholarship risks reinforcing epistemic monocultures that privilege certain intellectual lineages over others. Integrating Nyāya's moral-epistemic insights could not only diversify the philosophical canon but also provide conceptually sound and strong, culturally plural resources for creating more inclusive global justice frameworks.

OVERVIEW OF NYAYA PHILOSOPHY

Nyāya represents one of the six orthodox (āstika) schools within Indian philosophy, renowned for its comprehensive theory of logic (tarka), its epistemological framework, and its strong focus on rational inquiry as a means to uncover truth.Originating from a long-established Vedic tradition of structured debate (vāda) and intellectual contention during the early centuries of the Common Era, Nyāya has significantly influenced philosophical discourse.

The foundational text of the Nyāya School, the Nyāya Sūtras, was composed in the second century CE and is attributed to Sage Gautama, also known as Akṣapāda. This text laid down systematic principles for argumentation, reasoning, and the evaluation of truth claims.[10]

Nyāya is fundamentally concerned with identifying the valid means of acquiring valid knowledge (*pramāṇas*) and differentiating truth from error. Nyaya provides that liberation (*mokṣa*), understood as freedom from suffering, can only be obtained through the elimination of ignorance (*avidyā*) via correct cognition (*pramā*).[11]The Nyāya Sūtras offer a comprehensive framework for logical reasoning, which includes methods for resolving disputes, categorizing fallacies, and analyzing arguments. As such, the school played an important role in forming the epistemic discipline of the Indian philosophical tradition.

Classical Nyāya, flourished around 2nd- 12th centuries andwas codified in the *Nyāya Sūtras* and further expanded by various commentators such as Vātsyāyana(5th century CE), Uddyotakara (6th century CE), JayantaBhaṭṭa (9th century CE), and VācaspatiMiśra (10th century CE), It established a realist ontology and a fourfold epistemology:

1. **Perception (*pratyakṣa*)** – direct sensory knowledge.
2. **Inference (*anumāna*)** – reasoning based on observed signs.
3. **Comparison (*upamāna*)** – knowledge through analogy.

[10]NirmalyaGuha, *The Nyāya School of Indian Philosophy*, *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology* (2021),
[11]*The Nyāya Sūtra*, vol. VIII of *The Sacred Books of the Hindus* 1 (S.C. Vidyabhushana trans., Ashram Press 1913) (Bhuvaneshvara).

4. **Testimony (*śabda*)** – reliable verbal communication from authoritative sources.[12]

These pramāṇas served as the foundation for Nyāya's quest for objective truth. The metaphysical framework of the school acknowledged a variety of substances (dravya), qualities (guṇa), universals (sāmānya), particularities (viśeṣa), and actions (karma), while also affirming the existence of God (Īśvara) as an all-knowing and eternal entity. Thinkers from Classical Nyāya engaged extensively with competing philosophical traditions, particularly Buddhists and Mīmāṃsakas, upholding their epistemological realism with thorough logical examination[13].

Whereas the introduction of Navya-Nyāya in the 13th century signified a significant intellectual transition. Founded by Gaṅgeśa Upādhyāya, whose *Tattvacintāmaṇi* ("The Jewel of Reflection on the Truth") became a foundational text, Navya-Nyāya maintained the fundamental framework of Classical Nyāya while transforming its analytical fidelity[14]. Navya-Nyāya developed a very technical logical language that could clearly analyze difficult legal and philosophical issues. Philosophers were able to tackle linguistic, metaphysical, and epistemic issues with unparalleled rigor thanks to this new methodology, which used complex semantic distinctions and formalized inferential structures. Beyond philosophy, Navya-Nyāya had an impact on Sanskrit poetics, law, theology, and the interpretation of scripture.

CONCEPT OF EQUALITY IN NYAYA PHILOSOPHY

Although Nyāya is primarily known as a school of epistemology and logic, its foundational principles have profound implications for the notion of equality. By anchoring its prospective of human interaction in valid knowledge (*pramā*), impartial reasoning, and the elimination of bias (*doṣa*), Nyāya implicitly affirms the moral value of every rational being. However, the tradition also developed within a socio-religious environment that maintained hierarchical structures, creating a tension between its philosophical universals and its historical social context.[15]

Epistemic Equality: Every Rational Being as a Potential Knower (*pramātṛ*)

Nyāya holds that all beings capable of cognition possess the same basic capacity for valid knowledge. The *Nyāya Sūtra* (1.1.1)[16] begins with the statement that the pursuit of true knowledge leads to liberation (*apavarga*), without limiting this capacity to any caste, gender, or class in its formal logic. The status of *pramātṛ*, a "knower," is defined not by birth but by

[12] J. Pandey & M. Singh, *A Study on Congruence Between Classical Nyaya Sutras and Modern Theories of Knowledge*, 21J. Hum. Values106, 106–15 (2015)
[13] S. Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. 2.
[14]S. Pageni, A Thematic Study of Nyaya Philosophy with Research Methodology, 8 *PargatishilDarpan* 44, 44–49.
[15] S. Muhunthan, A Critical Analysis on Khyāti Vāda (Theory of Error) of Nyāya Philosophy, EDITOR'S NOTE, 27 (2016).
[16]Gautama, Nyāya Sūtra, in The Sacred Books of the Hindus, vol. VIII, trans. S. C. Vidyabhushana (Bhuvaneshvara: Ashram Press, 1913).

the presence of cognitive faculties, freedom from defects, and the use of valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*)[17].

This epistemic inclusivity implies that truth claims must be evaluated on their logical and evidentiary merits rather than on the social status of the claimant. In a legal context, this principle aligns with the modern concept that all individuals have the right to be heard and that the weight of testimony is determined by credibility, rather than identity.

Contemporary scholars engaged in Indian philosophy have started to revisit the epistemic and ethical framework of Nyāya to address modern challenges related to equality and social justice. Certain reinterpretations of Nyāya emphasize the importance of impartial reasoning and credible testimony as essential tools in addressing epistemic injustice, which occurs when specific groups are systematically undermined as legitimate knowers.

Additionally, some scholars point out that Nyāya's dedication to universal logical principles and discourse can be utilized to advocate for egalitarian reforms across legal systems, educational institutions, and governance structures.This notion of epistemic inclusivity suggests that assertions of truth should be assessed based on their logical coherence and evidential support, rather than the social standing of the individual making the claim. In the realm of law, this tenet corresponds with the contemporary understanding that every person deserves the opportunity to present their case, and that the credibility of their testimony is what determines its significance, not their identity.

NYĀYA AND COMPARATIVE THEORIES OF EQUALITY

1) Nyāya and Rawlsian Fairness

John Rawls was a prominent American philosopher. His renowned work, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), set a benchmark for modern liberal theories of justice. His concept of "justice as fairness" rests on two principles:

- **Equal Basic Liberties** –Every individual possesses an identical array of fundamental freedoms and rights.
- **Difference Principle** – Socio-economic inequalities are permissible only if they benefit the least advantaged members of society.

In order to ensure fairness in the establishment of these principles, Rawls presents the concept of the original position, a hypothetical social contract situation where decision-makers are placed behind a veil of ignorance. Within this thought experiment, individuals lack knowledge of their societal status, class affiliation, natural abilities, or personal prejudices, compelling them to embrace principles that are equitable for everyone[18].

[17]Mukherjee, Deepraj. (2020). Nyāya -Sutras and the Modern Decision-Making Process in an Organization: A Note.
[18] Prakash Kumar Pathak, "Correlation Study of Principles of Justice, NyayDarshan and Indian Constitution," Peer-Reviewed Research Journal 33.

Despite the significant differences in time and culture between Rawlsian liberalism and classical Nyāya thought, there are notable conceptual similarities emerge when examining the ethical and epistemic commitments outlined in the Nyāya Sūtra. For instance, in Nyāya Sūtra 1.1.2–1.1.3, Gautama enumerates cognitive defects (doṣa) such as rāga (attachment), dveṣa (aversion), and moha (delusion) that impair judgment. According to Nyāya, achieving justice necessitates the conscious removal of these biases before engaging in debate or decision-making (vāda)·this is quite similar to Rawls' veil of ignorance, which eliminates knowledge of individual circumstances to ensure that principles are chosen without favoritism. Both frameworks recognize that self-interest corrupts fairness.

Furthermore, Nyāya philosophy affirms the equality of all rational agents (*pramātṛ*) in their capacity to attain valid knowledge (*pramā*) and ultimately liberation (*apavarga*). This epistemic equality mirrors Rawls's principle of equal basic liberties, wherein every person is entitled to the same moral standing and respect. Vātsyāyana's*Nyāya Bhāṣya* reinforces this egalitarian outlook by asserting that truth is equally accessible to all who employ valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), irrespective of their social status.[19] Similarly, both Nyāya and Rawlsian frameworks emphasize procedural fairness as the foundation of justice. For Rawls, just institutions arise from fair decision-making procedures rather than predetermined outcomes; Nyāya, too, upholds procedural integrity through valid modes of cognition—perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), testimony (*śabda*), and comparison (*upamāna*). In both cases, justice derives from the reliability and impartiality of method rather than the nature of the result.[20]

Despite these similarities, important philosophical divergences that remain. Rawls's theory is rooted in a political ontology influenced by the logic of constitutional democracy and the moral force of the social contract. Nyāya, by contrast, situates justice within a metaphysical framework that views the self (*ātman*) as eternal and liberation as the ultimate goal; fairness in the social world functions as an instrumental step toward spiritual freedom rather than an end in itself. In terms of focus, Rawls primarily addresses distributive justice as the equitable allocation of rights, duties, and resources within a political community, whereas Nyāya focuses on epistemic and procedural justice, regarding correct knowledge as the necessary foundation for just social relations. Rawls also permits inequalities under his difference principle, provided they benefit the least advantaged. Nyāya, though not formulating an economic principle, evaluates inequality through its effect on access to truth and moral reasoning, condemning disparities that hinder intellectual or ethical integrity.

Thus, Nyāya can serve as a culturally grounded philosophical resource for interpreting Rawlsian fairness in contexts where epistemic justice, as the fair distribution of knowledge and recognition, is as vital as material equality. Its incorporation into global discussions provides a pluralistic re-envisioning of fairness that integrates ethical, cognitive, and social aspects of human equality.

[19] B. Gupta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy* (Routledge 2012).
[20] J.N. Mohanty, *Classical Indian Philosophy* (Rowman&Littlefield Publishers 2000) (U.K.).

2) Nyāya and Aristotelian Justice

Aristotle's notion of justice is rooted in his extensive framework of virtue ethics, primarily articulated in the Nicomachean Ethics (Book V) and Politics. Aristotle posits that justice (dikaiosynē) represents the "complete virtue" demonstrated towards others; it transcends a mere moral disposition and encompasses the tangible manifestation of virtue within interpersonal interactions.[21]He makes a distinction between:

1. Distributive justice: awards and goods are given out proportionately based on merit.

2. Correctivejustice: righting wrongs, whether they are involuntary (crimes) or voluntary (contracts).

Although the Nyāya philosophy and Aristotelian thought emerge from separate intellectual traditions, both exhibit a teleological perspective that connects justice to the fulfillment of a higher human objective. For Aristotle, the ultimate goal of life is eudaimonia, flourishing attained through various actions, whereas for Nyāya, the supreme aim (niḥśreyasa) is apavarga, or liberation from suffering. In both philosophical frameworks, justice is not viewed as an abstract contractual principle but rather as an essential element of moral and intellectual growth. Nyāya perceives justice as a fundamental requirement for dharma (moral order) and for the achievement of truthful knowledge, both of which lead to liberation. Likewise, Aristotle places justice within the larger context of virtue ethics, considering it a vital condition for the well-being of the community. Their convergence also encompasses the notion of proportionality: Aristotle asserts that distributive justice should allocate rewards based on merit, while in Nyāya philosophy, proportionality is evident in epistemic contexts, where the testimony (śabda) of a trustworthy and knowledgeable speaker (āpta) is given greater significance. This illustrates a common belief that value and trust ought to align with proven moral or intellectual capability.

A comparable parallel emerges in their understanding of corrective justice. Aristotle's notion of correction restores balance when wrongdoing disrupts equality, whereas Nyāya analogously addresses cognitive imbalance through its theory of *mithyājñāna* (false cognition) and *hetvābhāsa* (fallacious reasoning). In both frameworks, the rectification of error—whether moral or epistemic- serves to re-establish order and fairness. Yet significant divergences remain. Aristotle's conception of justice is virtue-centered, grounded in the cultivation of character and civic responsibility within the *polis*. Nyāya, in contrast, is fundamentally epistemological: it assumes that right action flows naturally from right knowledge (*yathārthajñāna*), positioning the moral agent primarily as a knower rather than a doer. Moreover, Aristotle's proportional justice presupposes a hierarchical social order and does not advocate strict equality, while Nyāya, though historically operating within a stratified society, embeds within its epistemic framework a latent universalism—the view that every rational being (*pramāṭṛ*) possesses the potential for valid knowledge (*pramā*). Finally, Aristotle's justice is confined to the political realm, focusing on civic institutions

[21] S. K. Maurya, "The Concept of Justice in Reference with Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle: A Critical Study," Journal of Liberty and International Affairs 7, no. 3 (2021).

and communal harmony, whereas Nyāya extends its reach beyond the worldly domain. Its conception of justice operates within law courts, scholarly discourse, and governance, yet it simultaneously aspires toward transcendent liberation from the cycle of birth and death. This synthesis of ethical, procedural, and metaphysical dimensions situates Nyāya as a distinctive counterpart to Aristotelian justice—one that integrates worldly fairness with ultimate liberation.

3) Nyāya in Dialogue with Buddhist Perspectiveson Equality

Epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics are the subjects of extensive inter-school debates in the Indian philosophical landscape. Nyāya's realist, logic-oriented framework often interacted directly with Buddhist thought, sometimes in sharp opposition, sometimes in subtle convergence. Although they are not always framed in contemporary political terms, justice and equality are implied in these discussions of each school's conceptions of truth, morality (dharma), and the common good.

The Nyāya School of philosophy offers a distinctive realist epistemology that stands in contrast to the idealist and phenomenological tendencies of certain Buddhist traditions. Nyāya defends the notion of a mind-independent reality (*yathārtha-jñāna*), asserting that truth can be discovered through valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*), including perception, inference, comparison, and testimony. This epistemic realism implies that every rational agent possesses the right and capacity to access true knowledge, a foundation for what may be described as epistemic equality. In contrast, Buddhist schools such as Yogācāra question this objective realism, emphasizing the mind's constructive role in shaping experience.[22] While Nyāya treats equality as grounded in rational access to truth and moral accountability, Buddhist thought tends to frame liberation as the transcendence of conceptual categories altogether.

Ethically, both systems converge in their concern for moral universality. Buddhism emphasizes *karuṇā* (compassion) and *ahiṃsā* (non-harming) as the guiding principles of moral action, while Nyāya places its emphasis on *dharma*—duty informed by reason and truthfulness[23]. The difference lies primarily in the justification: Nyāya roots justice and equality in reasoned recognition of reality and obligation, whereas Buddhism grounds them in the alleviation of suffering for all sentient beings. Metaphysically, Nyāya's affirmation of an enduring self (*ātman*) provides a stable foundation for moral responsibility and legal accountability, aligning with the idea that equality presupposes individual agency and moral autonomy. In contrast, the Buddhist doctrine of *anātman* (non-self) denies a permanent essence, locating equality instead in the shared impermanence and interdependence of all beings.[24] Thus, while both traditions uphold universal moral concern, Nyāya's epistemic and

[22]Sanjit Kumar Sadhukhan, *The Conflict Between the Buddhist and the Naiyāyika Philosophers: A Brief Survey* (1990).
[23]Richard Gombrich, *What the Buddha Thought* 110–14 (Equinox Publishing 2009).
[24] B.K. Matilal, *Ontological Problems in Nyāya, Buddhism and Jainism: A Comparative Analysis*, 5J. Indian Phil.91, 91–105 (1977)

metaphysical realism supplies a more structured framework for grounding equality in rational cognition and moral order.

4) Nyāya and Indian Constitutional Values

The Constitution of India, which was enacted in 1950, establishes Justice, Equality, and Liberty as fundamental principles in its Preamble, embodying modern democratic ideals while being deeply rooted in India's civilizational legacy. Although the framers drew inspiration from Western political thought—particularly liberalism, socialism, and republicanism—the intellectual heritage of ancient India, particularly Nyāya, offers a richer cultural basis for these principles. Understanding Nyāya within this constitutional framework reveals a historical continuum of thought where reason (tarka), justice (nyāya in its ethical aspect), and epistemic integrity resonate with constitutional values.

Nyāya philosophy, in its epistemological foundational conception of equality that resonates deeply with the constitutional principle of equality before the law embodied in Article 14 of the Indian Constitution.[25] Central to Nyāya thought is the belief that all rational beings (*pramātṛ*) possess the inherent capacity to attain valid knowledge (*pramā*), irrespective of birth, status, or social position. Although classical Indian society often operated within rigid hierarchies, the philosophical core of Nyāya rejects any metaphysical limitation on access to truth. This commitment to epistemic universality provides an indigenous philosophical grounding for modern democratic values such as equal access to education, participation in public reason, and fair representation.[26] In this respect, Nyāya's conception of the equality of knowers parallels the constitutional promise of equal protection under the law—ensuring that justice and truth remain universally attainable, not privileges confined to the elite.

Furthermore, the procedural ethics of Nyāya present a significant philosophical analogy to the constitutional rule of law. Its emphasis on vāda (truth-seeking discourse) rather than jalpa (argumentative contention) and vitaṇḍā (superficial critique) embodies the constitutional principle of deliberative reasoning as the cornerstone of democratic governance. Similarly, while Nyāya logic emphasizes the necessity of valid inference and coherence in argumentation, the rule of law requires that the application of state authority conforms to recognized legal standards and rational justification.[27] Both systems thus rest upon the conviction that the removal of ignorance (*avidyā*) and prejudice is essential for justice and equality. In Nyāya, liberation (*mokṣa*) represents the ultimate form of freedom, the emancipation of the intellect through true knowledge—while in the constitutional framework, freedoms of speech, expression, belief, and association secure the conditions necessary for intellectual autonomy and collective flourishing. Collectively, Nyāya philosophy and the Indian Constitution share a vision of a just social order founded on reason, knowledge, and the equal dignity of all individuals.

Lastly, India's constitutional philosophy is not merely an imported liberal democratic framework but also connects with indigenous rationalist traditions. This continuity

[25]The constitution of India, Art. 14.
[26] B.K. Matilal, *The Character of Logic in India* 34–39 (State Univ. of N.Y. Press 1998).
[27] S.N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* vols. I & III (Motilal Banarsidass 2022) (New Delhi).

strengthens the argument for Nyāya, not as a relic of scholastic logic, but as a living philosophical resource of legal theory, judicial reasoning, and egalitarian policy-making in modern India[28].

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of Nyāya philosophy and many justice frameworks, including Rawlsian fairness, Aristotelian virtue ethics, along Buddhist viewpoints, demonstrates that justice is a notion universally aspirational yet plural in interpretation. Nyāya offers anexclusive contribution to this discourse through its epistemic egalitarianism, rigorous logic, and moral realism, all grounded in a commitment to impartial reasoning and the finding of truth.

In contrast to many Western theories, which are primarily focused on institutional design and distributive outcomes, Nyāya integrates equality in the cognitive and ethical capacities of individuals, asserting that all rational beings are potential knowers (*pramāṭṛ*) and, therefore, entitled to participate in the determination of truth and fairness. This epistemic equality has far-reaching implications for politics and legal systems, where procedural justice and evidence-based adjudication are essential to provide rights and freedom.

The discourse with Buddhist philosophy emphasizes Nyāya's necessity to incorporate structural awareness of systemic injustices;these interactions suggest a more structured, multi-dimensional model of equality and justice that is concurrently procedural, distributive, and moral.

Whereas the philosophical continuity between Nyāya's rationalism and the core principles of the Indian Constitution suggests that modern constitutional justice in India is not a mere transplantation of Western liberal theories but a contextual synthesis, a mixture of indigenous intellectual traditions with global democratic norms. Articles 14, 15, 19, and 21 can thus be reinterpreted not only through the lens of Western jurisprudence but also as institutional embodiments of Nyāya's commitment to reasoned equality, procedural fairness, and liberation from ignorance.

The research highlights a major gap in the theory of contemporary global justice, that is, the near absence of Indic perspectives, especially Nyāya, in the mainstream philosophical canon. By integrating Nyāya into comparative political philosophy, legal theory, and human rights discourse, scholars and policymakers can diversify the epistemic foundations of equality. Such inclusion is not only a matter of cultural fairness but also a strategic expansion of conceptual resources, enabling more inclusive, context-sensitive, and philosophically robust approaches to addressing the moral and legal challenges of the twenty-first century.

In conclusion, Nyāya's perspective on equality, combining epistemic universality, moral realism, and procedural rigor, offers a valuable and underexplored framework for

[28] K. Lloyd, "Rethinking Rhetoric from an Indian Perspective: Implications in the Nyaya Sutra," *Rhetoric Review* 26, no. 4 (2007): 365–384.

reimagining equality and fairness in an interconnected world. Its resurgence and integration into contemporary legal and political thought have the potential to bridge cultural divides, enrich institutional practices, and deepen our collective understanding of what it means to live in a just society.

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